

# SISTER ACT

Portland  
siblings  
show  
us how  
planned  
togetherness  
can really  
work.

By **EMILY ZAHNISER**

architect  
**M.O.Daby  
Design**

builder  
**Cellar Ridge  
Construction**

landscape  
**Ecotone  
Environmental**

photography  
**KLiK Concepts**



## SISTERS NANCY AND ANITA

aren't new to sharing each other's lives. They grew up together after all. They host holiday gatherings together, raised each other's children and even built houses together side by side — twice. Now their latest double-dwelling project will help the two couples age together as well. "It's a good thing our husbands like each other," jokes Anita, younger sister to Nancy.



*"The clients desired a clean, bright, minimal palette for their living space, so a more massive contrasting tile chimney and darker wood floors anchor the space," architect Matt Daby says.*



*Anita's home features a sliding-door system that allows the family to close off the kitchen from the living space when desired.*



### Co-Living Separately in Southwest Portland

The two families have 30 years of experience balancing their embedded social lives within close proximity. Nancy's husband, John, a retired architect, built the families' side-by-side homes in far Southwest Portland when they were all young parents. The idea was pretty radical at the time. Some in the family feared that too much togetherness would have negative connotations. "Well, there was always an adult around when kids got home from school, and I'm not sure they liked so much supervision — especially when they were teenagers," recalls Nancy. "But we were, and continue to be, very respectful of each other's privacy. We don't just show up — our children didn't just show up — at each other's homes. We always phone or knock first."

This spirit of supporting each other yet remaining independent informed their second act of combined custom homebuilding. With their kids grown, the couples were ready to apply what they had learned



from the first set of homes into a second act focused on aging gracefully together.

### Different but Together

The couples brought on Matt Daby and Angela Mechaley of M.O.Daby Design to bring their vision for complementary Pacific Northwest Modernism-inspired homes to life. The new location had some key elements their previous homes lacked, including walkability to shops and services in the Multnomah Village area of Southwest Portland, and a light-filled half-acre lot adjacent to a large park.

The new design brought over favorite features from the families' first adjacent properties like covered outdoor patios and barbecue areas, and vaulted ceilings. The sisters didn't get their fantasy co-butler's pantry, however. "Our dream was to be able to move some shared domestic items back and forth to one another without walking them down the sidewalk," said Anita. "We only have one ironing board, Cuisinart, and KitchenAid Mixer — and only one set of good china. But obviously, that didn't work out!" What did work out was a pair of upper-level decks that face each other. "We find ourselves talking across the yard and yelling, 'Hey, what's for dinner?,'" much more easily now," Nancy laughs.

The two homes complement each other externally. The same shed rooflines, siding materials and window casings create a cohesive vision on the lot. "Creating similar external shapes with different materials gives the effect of a 'different but



*"These clients wanted a wood-focused room requiring a visually lighter, more simple plaster material to clad the chimney and maintain balance," Daby says. "Both of the families have living rooms that stretch the fireplace mantels to create built-in sitting nooks adjacent to the fire."*



together' visual that I feel is emblematic of the relationship between these two families," says Daby.

Internally, the homes express what's different about the couples. Nancy and John embraced natural wood and organic colors throughout their home. At the same time, Anita and Alan wanted a blank slate to feature their colorful artwork and furniture. Both houses have high-volume ceilings and open floor plans, but Anita utilizes a sliding door system to close off her kitchen from the living space when desired.

### Future-Proof Design

One thing the couples agreed upon was a view to the long-term sustainability of both the homes and their separate/together lifestyles. M.O.Daby and builder Cellar Ridge both focus on high-performance and sustainable building practices by default. That commitment worked well with John's design desires. South-facing glazing offers views to the park and ample natural light, while supporting passive solar heat and reduced energy consumption. Toxic-free building materials contribute to healthier indoor air quality — an important feature for aging occupants. Native wood, like Douglas fir cabinets and white oak flooring, is from a local, renewable resource





with a lighter carbon footprint.

Both homes have been equipped with framing for future elevator shafts, blocking for grab bars and other mobility aids, and lever door handles that only require a one-quarter turn for accessibility. John and Nancy's shower is a sealed, waterproof plaster instead of tile to minimize maintenance. Zero-barrier showers, generous hallways and doorframes, and main floors that can transition to future single-level living allow the couples to age in place gracefully.

Some less obvious choices highlight just how well the relationship between them has come to fruition in these homes. Nancy explains: "Instead of a duplex, we chose to move forward with two separate structures for our children's future ease of managing



*Street view of Anita and Nancy's new side-by-side homes.*

ready. "We could potentially house live-in help for both families in our home when the time comes," says Nancy.

For now, walking the ironing board down the sidewalk and checking in with each other through peekaboo windows is enough. Or not quite. "One night a month, Nancy and I meet in the driveway to howl at the full moon," says Anita. "It was a pain to have to drive to one another's houses for the three years we didn't live next to each other." 🏠

affairs." Additionally, they have divided and conquered on some livability features. While both homes have the potential for a separate apartment on the ground floor to house live-in help, Nancy and John, older by about a decade, have their home turnkey

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